

Making the Connection between Health and Achievement: Nebraska's School Nurses

The professional licensed school nurse “is the leader in the school community to oversee school health policies and programs. The school nurse serves in a pivotal role to provide expertise and oversight for the provision of school health services and promotion of health education. Using clinical knowledge and judgment, the school nurse provides health care to students and staff, performs health screenings and coordinates referrals to the medical home or private healthcare provider. The school nurse serves as a liaison between school personnel, family, community and healthcare providers to advocate for health care and a healthy school environment.” (American Nurses Association & National Association of School Nurses [ANA & NASN], 2011). Schools are seeing more and more students with chronic health conditions as well as mental health concerns. Providing health care in the school setting for students with chronic health conditions is judicious to their learning and mental health is as critical to academic success as physical well-being. (National Association of School Nurses 2013).

What do School Nurses do?

The National Association of School Nurses defines school nursing as a specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the well-being, academic success and lifelong achievement and health of students. To that end, school nurses facilitate normal development and positive student response to interventions; promote health and safety including a healthy environment; intervene with actual and potential health problems; provide case management services; and actively collaborate with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self-advocacy, and learning (NASN, 2010 <https://www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsFullView/tabid/462/ArticleId/87/Role-of-the-School-Nurse-Revised-2011>).

What are the activities of a School Health Services Program?

The overall goal of the school health services program is to contribute to the educational success, well-being, and lifelong health of every student. To accomplish this, school health services programs:

- Provide health screening and immunization monitoring.
- Promote measures that help control the spread of communicable disease.
- Provide individualized health care planning and direct care for children with special needs.
- Promote utilization of primary care and other community resources to promote health of children and families.
- Promote a healthy and safe school environment.
- Provide health education and health promotion activities.
- Evaluate the health program periodically and identify new priorities and needs.

Are School Nurses “required” in Nebraska?

There is no law or regulation in Nebraska specifically requiring schools to employ a licensed nurse. However, a number of related regulations and statutes speak to the role of the licensed health professional at school:

- The Medication Aide Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-6718 to 71-6742 and Title 92 NAC 59, “Regulations for School Health and Safety) identifies the role of the licensed health professional in determining competency of unlicensed school personnel in administering medication at school.
- School Health Screening Statutes (Neb. Rev. Stat. 79-248 through 79-253) requires a licensed health professional to determine competency of unlicensed personnel to conduct vision, hearing, dental/oral health, and other health screenings.
- Nebraska Nurse Practice Act and Regulations (Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-1,132.01 to 71-1,132.53 and Title 172 NAC 99, “Provision of Nursing Care) prohibit the practice of nursing by any unqualified and unlicensed person under penalty of law. These laws and regulations require that only the Registered Nurse may make delegation decisions, determining when an unlicensed person may carry out nursing interventions as are provided at school with children with health conditions. Circumstances when an unlicensed person may not assume responsibility for interventions are also identified.
- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act requires states that receive federal funding under IDEA must provide “related services”, which include health services such as school nurse services that are a component of the child’s IEP. Related services encompass a broad range of health services. Services provided by a physician (other than for diagnostic and evaluation purposes) may be excluded, but services that can be provided by a nurse or qualified layperson must be covered. (NAC Title 92 Chapter 51 003.50)
- Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act also obligate school systems to provide care to eligible children with disabilities using appropriately qualified personnel so these children may access public education.

What are the qualifications of a School Nurse?

A person using the title “nurse” or “school nurse” must possess a Nebraska license to practice nursing which is currently active and in good standing. Any member of the public can verify licensure information at the following website: www.dhhs.ne.gov/crl/profindex1.htm. In Nebraska, the school nurse may be a Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). In Nebraska, an RN is permitted to practice independently within the regulated scope of practice. An LPN is not allowed to practice independently. If an LPN, the school nurse must assure a relationship is in place to provide supervision and direction for the LPN by a Registered Nurse, Advance Practice Registered Nurse, or Medical Doctor.

If an employing district requires the school nurse to obtain a special services certificate from the Dept. of Education, a bachelor’s degree at a minimum is required. Requirements for a special services certificate can be found at <http://www.education.ne.gov/tcert/Ftchcert.html>.

Applicable practice settings that seem to translate well to the school setting include previous history of: emergency room nursing, ambulatory care, public health, mental health, and pediatrics. The nursing skill set relevant to school nursing includes: strong physical assessment skills, ability to respond to medical crisis, knowledge of pediatric chronic health issues (asthma, diabetes, severe allergy, seizure) strong oral and written communication skills, family-centered practice, knowledge of normal development age 0-21 years, the ability to work in a non-health care-centered multidisciplinary environment, and the ability to work independently.